

Public Meeting Schedule

Date	Location	Place	Time
November 8, 1999	Juneau, Alaska	Juneau Federal Building, Room 445, 709 West 9th Street	1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.
November 9, 1999	Anchorage, Alaska	Anchorage Federal Building, Room 135, 222 West Seventh Avenue	1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.
November 10, 1999	Kodiak, Alaska	Kodiak Inn, 236 West Rezanof Drive	1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.
November 12, 1999	Seattle, Washington	Alaska Fisheries Science Center, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Building 4, Room 2039	1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.



National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service
P.O. Box 21688
Juneau, AK

ALASKA GROUND FISH FISHERIES

SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT



Project Background

In 1976, Congress passed into law what is currently known as the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA). This law authorized the United States right to manage its fishery resources out to 200 miles off its coast. Regional Councils were established and they were charged to prepare fishery management plans (FMPs) for every fishery that required management. Two of the earliest FMPs in the country were the Gulf of Alaska Groundfish FMP in 1978, and the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Groundfish FMP in 1981. Both plans had to satisfy MSFCMA and other applicable federal laws, including the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

In 1978 and in 1981, Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) were prepared and approved for both the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) and Bering Sea Aleutian Islands (BSAI) Groundfish FMPs, respectively. Since then, these FMPs have been amended more than 50 times, each requiring a NEPA analysis. Depending on the significance of the issue, either an Environmental Assessment, or a more in-depth EIS was prepared, and approved.

In the early 1990s, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) began to recognize that the original GOA and BSAI EISs were severely out-of-date. Here in Alaska, scientists have documented significant

changes to the physical and biological environments since the EISs were prepared. The cause for these large ecosystem changes is not presently known and is the subject of considerable research at the local, national, and international level. What we do know is that in the late-1970's, some species such as king crab, herring, and Steller sea lions were abundant, but are less so today. Conversely, other species that were not very abundant then, such as pollock, cod, and flatfish, are more abundant today.

Changes too have occurred in the human environment. The Alaska groundfish fishery, once dominated by foreign fishing fleets in the 1970s and 1980s, has since been replaced by U.S. fishermen. Changes have occurred on how the fish are caught, where the harvest takes place, who takes the harvest, and where the harvest is processed. Today, both the GOA and BSAI FMPs reflect an evolution of the American fishing industry in Alaska. As more is learned about the fishery, scientists, managers, and the public work together to design new management programs through the Council process aimed at addressing both immediate problems as well as issues concerning the health of the marine ecosystem and the fisheries dependent on it.

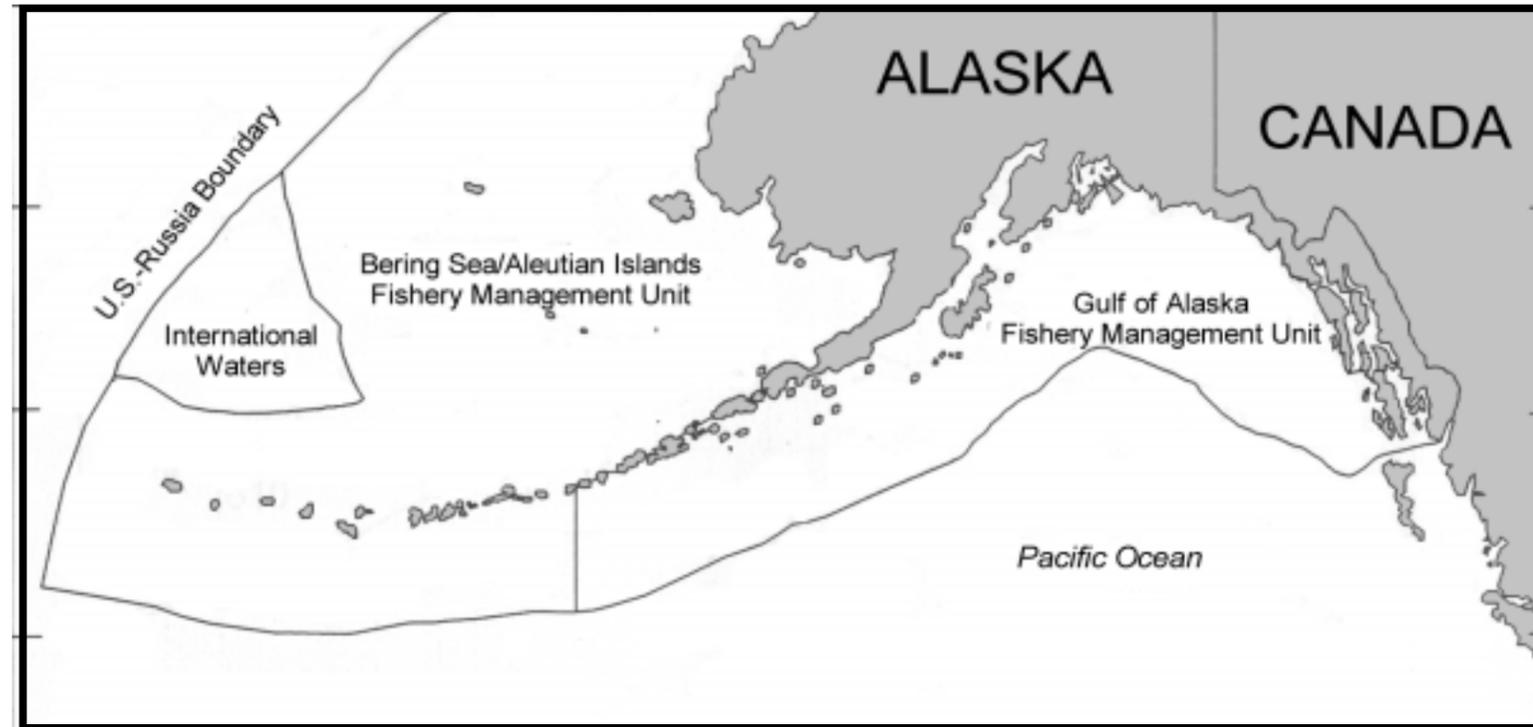
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In 1997 NMFS started preparing a supplemental EIS (SEIS) to reflect changes that had occurred since the original EISs were prepared for the GOA and BSAI FMPs. This SEIS was completed in December 1998. In early 1999, the SEIS was challenged in court. The Court later agreed with the plaintiffs that the 1998 SEIS, was too narrow in scope and that a programmatic, or "big picture" analysis should have been done. The court returned the 1998 SEIS to NMFS with instructions on what it expected the next SEIS to contain.

On October 1, 1999, NMFS announced its intention to prepare a new SEIS for the GOA and BSAI Groundfish FMPs. With this announcement, official scoping for the SEIS has begun. This newsletter will be the first of several that will keep interested parties apprised to the agency's progress and highlight opportunities for public input into the NEPA process. Public involvement will increase the likelihood that the new SEIS will be found to be legally adequate and provide a useful resource to federal agency decision-makers.

The NEPA Process

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was signed into law in 1970 in response to an overwhelming national sentiment that federal agencies should take the lead in providing greater protection for the environment. NEPA is our country's basic national charter for protection of the environment. It established environmental policy for the nation, provides an interdisciplinary framework for federal agencies, and



established procedures and a public process to ensure that federal agency decision-makers take environmental factors into account. The analysis prepared for the federal decision-maker is typically an environmental assessment (EA) or an environmental impact statement (EIS).

What is Scoping?

The first step in the NEPA process is Scoping. Scoping is a public process to obtain comments on environmental issues and alternatives to be considered in the SEIS. Scoping allows the project team to discover alternatives or potential significant environmental impacts that may have been overlooked. Scoping meetings are scheduled to be held in November 1999 (see page 4 for dates). Issues were identified during the 1998 SEIS scoping process include:

- Support for ecosystem-based management
- Concern about Steller sea lions
- Providing full disclosure during NEPA process
- Biological derivation for prohibited species limits

We want your comments!

Four public scoping meetings will be held during early November 1999 in Anchorage, Juneau, Kodiak and Seattle (see page 4 for dates and locations). After a short presentation given by the NMFS project team leader, the public will be invited to provide formal comments that are recorded. Comment sheets will also be available for people to fill out and leave at the meeting or mail in. All comments received, either informally, formally, or in writing, will be considered during the development of the SEIS. Although scoping is an ongoing process, comments must be received by **December 15, 1999** to be considered in the development of the Draft SEIS. Your comments are important to us.

How would you like to contact us?

For more information, contact:
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Phone: 907-271-3523
Fax: 907-271-3030
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Written comments can be sent to:
Lori Gravel
Sustainable Fisheries Division
National Marine Fisheries Service
P.O. Box 21688
Juneau, AK 99802

Comments may be hand-delivered to:
Room 457-1
Federal Office Building
907 W. 9th Street
Juneau, AK

THE NEPA PROCESS

<p>Scoping</p> <p>Public Scoping Meetings November 8-12, 1999 Scoping Ends: December 15, 1999</p>
<p>Development of Draft SEIS</p> <p>Draft SEIS Anticipated in October 2000</p>
<p>Public Comment Opportunity</p> <p>30 days</p>
<p>Development of Final SEIS</p> <p>Final SEIS Anticipated in July 2001</p>
<p>Public Comment Opportunity</p> <p>30 days</p>